

difficulties by our not attempting to reconcile them with the belief in perfect goodness or omnipotence were by them solved in a very illogical way indeed, but still in a way which did somehow harmonise the holiness of God and the evil of the world. God was not directly the author even of the Creator. From the infinite abyss of Deity arises a long series of emanations (St. Paul's "endless genealogies"),—emanations which expressing originally, perhaps, some manifestation or attribute of Divinity, pass insensibly through the medium of allegory into impersonation. When following these genealogies, we are indeed in that middle region where the turn of a phrase marks the distinction between a person and an abstraction, and the narrative appears a fantastic legend or the poetic clothing of convictions relating to the spiritual world, according as we use the Greek names or the English. Dean Mansel's few helpful suggestions as to the meaning of these allegories might, we think, have been carried further; he doubtless feared insisting on what seemed to him obvious, and of course such impersonations as that of Thought mated with Truth, and Speech with Life, are simple enough; yet still we think they are worth dwelling upon. Here we must only mention the last of these Emanations, a female being,—the Sophia, for her son is indeed the Demiurgus to whose blundering workmanship this world is due. His work, however, is only half his own. Himself a merely natural (or psychical) being; his creature, Man a spiritual one. "He made heaven, not knowing heaven," says the narrative emphatically; "and he made man, not knowing man." His creation may be considered a type of all creation of genius,—the working of constructive power under the guidance of a higher impulse hidden from the worker. But it was peculiar in this, that the work was a higher thing than the worker. The Creator, or, as we would venture to characterise him, the principle of Nature, is on a lower grade than man. Unconsciously to himself, his mother's influence worked on him in his creation; the *psychical* man, as St. Paul has it, is his creature entirely, but that in man which is spiritual belongs to a higher being, and lies in this natural creation awaiting the full development which is to fit it for a higher sphere. Thus man is threefold,—an earthly body from the realm of blind matter; a psychical or natural soul, the sole produce of the Creator; and a spiritual principle implanted by Sophia, awaiting the purification of deliverance from association with these perishable elements. And carrying out the allegory we have ventured to discern in this strange myth, we may find a vivid interest in the passage where this embodied principle of Nature, glorying in his supposed supremacy, declares, "I am Father and Lord, and there is none beside me," and is awe-struck at the voice that reveals to him the world above,—"Speak not falsely, for over thee is the Father of all, and not He alone." The revelation made by the Spirit of wisdom to the Spirit of nature arouses different feelings in different versions of the myth; that which seems to us fullest of meaning represents the Demiurgus as rejoicing at his deliverance from a weight of solitary grandeur, and recognising in Christ a being adequate to that burden of responsibility—the government of the universe—which he gladly resigns to him.

Of course, this myth is quite futile as an explanation of the existence of evil,—all it does is to substitute an imperfect Creator for an imperfect creation. This was seen by a thinker here and there at that time as clearly as it is perceived by every thinker now. But men are slow to perceive an ultimate difficulty, and state their perplexities in many various forms before they perceive that they are taking a paraphrase for an answer. Perhaps, indeed, many minds who would find no other value in their speculations might regard them with some interest, as the first specimen of that curious substitution of Nature for God which has proved an intellectual refuge to such various minds, in the perplexity of confronting facts which it seems impossible to bring into any relation with the divine will. The whole line of argument was refuted by the orthodox Father who answered the Gnostics, "We do not say that the axe hews wood, or that the saw cuts it." It is strange to extract an argument that would be suitable to the reasoning of Hume from the pages of Irenæus.

But the speculations thus vitiated as an attempt to explain the origin of evil must not be regarded from a single point of view. We must especially consider their position in the historic development of religion. Gnosticism builds up the bridge between polytheism and monotheism. It has been called "*la dernière apparition du monde ancien, venant combattre son successeur, avant de lui céder le monde humain*," and we may regard it, in part, as the survival of tendencies and instincts which had lost their objects,—of such a yearning after the old religion, for instance, as Goethe has expressed in his "*Bride of Corinth*." Christ

is the central figure, but the elder gods, thinly disguised, are there,—pallid and dim, and ready to vanish, perhaps all the more welcome that they are ready to vanish. Among those who submitted to the general tendency that bore men towards the new creed, there must have been many who sighed for the rich, prismatic variety of an Olympus that mirrored the passions, the instincts, the hopes and fears that quicken our human world, and for these the "endless genealogies" from which Paul, even at the very birth of Christianity, warned his disciples, though they may seem to us frigid enough allegories, afforded at least some promise of satisfaction. The Gnostics joined to a devout reverence for Christ and a humble trust in the "Father, by whose presence alone the soul becomes pure" (to quote the words of one of them), a belief in a thickly-peopled invisible world, continuing beyond the boundary of sense the gradation which, within that boundary, we everywhere discern between high and low. A century after the period of their main activity the Emperor Alexander Severus enshrined in his lararium the statue of Christ with that of Abraham and of Orpheus. That combination is a rationalistic translation of the mystic yearnings that resulted in Gnosticism.

Nor must the strong bias of the mind of that day towards this multiform representation of Deity, the sense of blank left by a vanished Olympus, be accepted as the only consideration explaining the adoption of this new mythology in order to answer a question which it could not answer. The intellectual as well as the religious tendencies of that age readily adjusted themselves to the belief that Creation was the work of an inferior being. We find here, as we often find in any attempt to deal with an ultimate difficulty, that the answer which alone would be inadequate seems to gain external support in taking a double form, and to corroborate itself by mere self-multiplication. The subordinate position of the Creator afforded only one-half the explanation of the low condition of the creation. The material was imperfect as well as the artist, or rather the material was bad, while the artist was only imperfect. It was that evil thing which appears as a sort of antithesis to God in early thought,—the formless world of matter. This view, generally associated with the full development of this system, known as Manichæism, seems to us quite as essential a part of Gnosticism. Indeed it is the kernel of a much wider range of thought than that suggested by either of these names. It is worth while, therefore, to make some effort to understand a faith so unlike our own.

Of course, in so doing, we must take our departure from the point of view of the ascetic. That was the only point of view accessible to those days. It seems to us that it was the right point of view for those days. If the men described by Martial and Juvenal were to reverence family life, they must keep their highest reverence for some other than family life. Now, Gnosticism supplied the intellectual complement of asceticism. If the best life is that which has least connection with the flesh, not only clothing spirits in bodies was altogether a blunder (this belief being the very centre of Gnosticism), but the means for making this blunder could not have been supplied by any volition of a Divine Being. To the Gnostics, and perhaps to some other thinkers of that time, even among the orthodox, matter stood as much out of relation to Divine will, or rather to will at all, as space does to us. No one feels that we are denying omnipotence to God in saying that He could not change any of the laws of space. We cannot believe in a time when these laws began to be; they are the expression of truths which must exist whenever there is any mind to apprehend them. Extend that conviction from space to that which fills space, and you reach the point of view we are attempting to describe. And if this parallel with Space seems rather to hinder than help the explanation we are suggesting, for certainly no one ever thought of finding an explanation of the origin of evil in the laws of geometry, we must remind such a reader that matter was not to the imagination of that time what it is to us,—the substratum and exhibition of Order. To the educated mind of our day, the very word suggests its correlate,—force. To the educated mind of that day, the thing it suggested was its opposite,—spirit. To them it was nothing more than the antithesis of spirit,—sometimes it seems to have meant simply the antithesis of life. The only non-spiritual laws known to them, the laws of geometry, were positively confused and falsified when they were applied to any material substance. They felt with regard to any investigation of the material world as a mathematician would feel who saw a student testing the truth of Euclid's propositions by cutting out actual triangles in some rough material,—that such a method of study was one in which truth, if attained at all, was attained merely by accident.

Remembering these three facts—that the men of that age knew nothing of the laws which make the material world so interesting and we may almost say so spiritual, to the modern intellect; that they did not believe its substratum to have been called into the existence by the divine will; and that one particular set of evil tendencies represented to them the whole of sin—we shall see that their view of the essential evil of matter was a theory which at least connected many deep-rooted convictions and gave some answers to many perplexities. Here was something not created by God, was not this the cause of all the facts of life which were not according to His will? The affirmative seems to us, from this point of view, not an unnatural one.

From this antithesis of matter and spirit, with the inevitable mean between, arises a kind of trinity of existence which forms the frame-work of all Gnostic speculation, and which, we believe, gives a clue to the real meaning of many passages in the New Testament, affording much help towards understanding what St. Paul meant by the *natural* man. On the one hand, the Gnostics contemplated the life that was homogeneous with God's life, the life of pure spirit, the domain of unity, simplicity, singleness, a life that has no connection with anything material, that is pure life, pure spiritual activity. On the other hand stands the formless world of matter, or death; the region of mere division, separation, disunion, concentrated in the person of Satan. Between these two lies the *psychical* region, —to select the word which seems to give most truly the associations of the many synonyms which might be chosen here. As Manichæan thought dwelt specially on the antagonism between the worlds of spirit and of matter, so in Gnostic speculation this intervening region, the world of Nature, emerges into prominence, and becomes incorporated and personified in the Creator. There is a tendency in some Gnostic sects to bring the Creator into a close proximity with Satan, but on the whole, he is more closely related to the divine world, from which, indeed, he has arisen by evolution. The Gnostic Satan, indeed, is a dim and shadowy being, and a Gnostic saying, preserved by Origen, that "the Devil has no will, only desire," seems to us true rather of the animal than of the diabolic nature. The definition of the psychical or natural temperament, on the other hand, as an "over-busy spirit" (*φύσις πολυπραγμον*)—one in which the principle of activity is out of proportion to the spirit of apprehension—is full of a subtle and profound truth. The Demiurge is the personification of this spirit, and his creation the embodiment of ignorant activity. Thus the Creation is identified with the Fall. Evil is coeval with the sanction conferred on the blind world of matter by its union with the moulding, formative spirit of life. And how much influence this hypothesis has had on later thought will be discovered, we think, with some surprise by any one who, endeavouring to trace the ideas of *Paradise Lost* to any Scriptural foundation, should discover how much, through that medium, we read into Genesis, and how large a part of a past mythology is there incorporated.

While Gnosticism may thus be considered as transmitting one element to the popular theology, its genealogical connection with much philosophical speculation in our day (a connection pointed out in the volume before us) is more obvious, it has, at least, been more noted. "Basilides," says Baron von Bunsen, speaking of the most interesting of Gnostic thinkers, "was the first, not only of all Christians, but of all philosophers, to regard the creation of this world in the light of a progressive evolution." The whole conception of the origin of the Universe apparent in these speculations is one to which the last word, modern as its sound, is much more applicable than is that of Creation. It is the peculiar interest of Gnosticism that it commemorates the speculations of those questioning spirits who confronted a world of evil and misery, and a God descended for its redemption, under the light both of a fading mythology and a dawning philosophy. The worshipper of Mithra and the believer in Evolution both find their kindred here.

A web of thought that thus gathers up into one unity the future and the past repays earnest and unprejudiced study. And if we cannot say of the volume before us that it conveys as fully as we should desire the results of such study, yet in its wide range of learning and lucid power of representation it forms, at least, a valuable introduction to this memorial of a phase of spiritual life that no one can learn to know without becoming better qualified to understand the early ages of Christianity, and hence, we believe, understanding better the meaning of Christianity for all time.

"MEN OF THE TIME."*

Most readers will remember Oliver Holmes's quaint conceit of the three Johns—the real John, John's ideal John, and Thomas's ideal John. Only one of the three Johns, he added, could be taxed; only one could be weighed on a platform-balance; but the other was just as important in the conversation. Now, for all practical purposes, Dr. Holmes clearly held that the three Johns could be viewed distinct and apart from each other: a careful and lengthened study of that printed Pantheon of present-day greatness, *Men of the Time*, has convinced us that this is an error, and that the three may be so cunningly mingled and intertwined together as to compel a reference to Mr. Matthew Arnold's very apt phrase, and to justify an application of it on a lower, but perhaps equally appropriate level,—as there is not seldom to be found here, in very truth, "a magnified and non-natural man," with all three John's compounded and inseparable. Let us take a hasty glance at this distended volume, this squat monstrosity of a book, and see if we can find such support for our suggestion as will satisfy impartial witnesses.

Of course there is a certain class of names which can be gathered from official lists of one kind or other—Princes, Bishops, Members of Parliament, and so forth—and for the purposes of such a volume must be collected in a purely mechanical manner, no choice being allowed. These must be quietly ignored for the nonce, and the mind concentrated on an order less definitively marked, if we would discover where "Thomas's ideal John" most cunningly commingles and assort itself with "John's real John" and "John's ideal John," to give us the most remarkable of all these "Men of the Time." It is fortunate that, as the book grows by a process of accretion peculiar to itself, the latest edition—the ninth—which we now have in our hands more readily yields itself to our scrutiny and criticism than any former one would have done.

Opening the book and turning over a few pages, we come, of course, very soon upon the historical name of Arnold. Putting aside Mr. Matthew Arnold, who is fairly treated, the reader's eye catches the names of Arthur and Edwin, who are about as prominent as Matthew. We learn that to Edwin Arnold—who spent some time in the East—belongs the honour of having, on behalf of the proprietors of the *Daily Telegraph*, arranged the first expedition of Mr. George Smith to Assyria, as well as that of Mr. H. M. Stanley to Africa, to carry forward the great work of Livingstone; and we further learn that for his part in "arranging" Mr. Smith's expedition he was thanked by the Trustees of the British Museum. Finding these expeditions loom so large under the head of "Arnold," we feel anxious to know something of Mr. George Smith, and turn to the proper place. Here we have Dr. Angus Smith, Christopher Webb Smith, Dr. Henry Boynton Smith, Isaac Smith, Richard Smith, and other Smiths, but no George Smith is here. Then we try Stanley, with no better luck. "Very odd," we say to ourselves; "the gentlemen of England, who stay at home at ease, seem to loom largely in these transactions in this book, and we quote to ourselves a certain apt line from the *Biglow Papers*. "But, perhaps, travellers are not admitted, only 'austere toilers' at home," we say to ourselves. So we try Rohlfs and Bastian, associated with African travel, but with no better success, and then we search for Richthofen with pains that give way at last to chagrin. But here is Colonel Grant, and there is Arminius Vambéry, so that travellers must be admitted after all, and we come to the reluctant conclusion that to shine in the reflected radiance of Mr. Edwin Arnold's "arranging" tact was held by the editor to be celebration enough for George Smith and H. M. Stanley. People's ideas of the relative importance of work do differ materially; and Darwin has told us eloquently that one function of the order of climbing-plants is to hide the trees they have reared themselves upon. After this, we need not hope that foreign names should be fully and intelligibly represented. Lepsius is fairly well set forth, but where is the laborious Treitschke, the light and more graceful Schmidt, or the most-learned Haeckel and Bergh? *Men of the Time* knows them not, nor does it know the Russians Tolstois and Turgenev, or the facile Frenchman Carpeaux. These things we cease to wonder at, when we find it so indifferent to what lies near at hand.

But we should be very far wrong to leave it to be inferred that the virtue of reserve is a matter on which the editor is exercised so much as he might be. He is often too communicative. "There

* *Men of the Time: a Dictionary of Contemporaries*. Containing Biographical Notices of Eminent Characters of both Sexes. Ninth Edition. Revised and Brought Down to the Present Time, by Thompson Cooper, F.S.A. London: George Routledge and Sons. 1875.